

HUMAN FORUM 2026
PROGRAM

DAY 1 – 24 November (Tuesday)
Historic Town Hall, SNP Square

Time	Programme session	
9:00 – 10:00	Registration and coffee break	
10:00 – 10:30	Official opening of the conference Mayor of Banská Bystrica, President of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, Rector of Matej Bel University, Institute for Democracy	
10:30 – 11:00	Programme Session 1 Moderator: Karolína Piliarová - Peter Stano – Head of the European Commission Representation - Tea Jaliashvili – OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (tbc) - Paul Sheridan – NOT IN OUR TOWN civic movement, Billings, Montana, USA (tbc)	
11:00 – 11:30	Dominika Hajdu – GLOBSEC, Trends in the Quality of Democracy	
11:30 – 12:00	Ivan Vejvoda – Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Vienna	
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	
13:00 – 14:30	Programme Session 2 Civil Society Resilience to Authoritarian Practices in Central and Eastern European Countries. (speakers from Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Ukraine) Moderator: Pavol Demeš	
14:30 – 15:00	Coffee break	
15:00 – 17:00	Programme Session 3 Democracy from the Ground Up – Strengthening Local Civic Communities Experiences of building and strengthening democratic infrastructure at local and regional levels, from the perspective of active citizens and civic initiatives. Moderator: Csilla Droppová	

17:00 – 17:30	Coffee break	
17:30 – 18:30	Programme Session 4 Gala Evening and Awards Ceremony HUMAN FORUM Award Host: Alexandra Bitušíková	
18:30 – 19:30	Gala reception	
20:00 – 21:00	Ecumenical Service at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier	

DAY 2 – 25 November (Wednesday)

Faculty of Political Science and International Relations / Záhřada – Centre for Independent Culture

Time	Programme session	
09:00 – 09:30	Registration and coffee break	
09:30 – 10:30 FPSIR auditorium	Programme Session 5 – in cooperation with Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica 9.30 – 9.40 Opening Democracy Under Pressure Introduction to the topic 9:40 – 9:55 Research Briefing 1 Rethinking Youth Participation: New Forms, Democratic Values and Levels of Engagement. Felix Butzlaff 9:55 – 10:10 Research Briefing 2 Countering Disinformation: What Can Public Policies Actually Achieve? Sophie Vériter <i>How have European institutions responded to misinformation and disinformation, how have these policies evolved, and what do we know about their potential and limitations?</i> 10:10 – 10:25 Research Briefing 3 How Much Violation of Democratic Rules Are Citizens Willing to Accept? Jozef Michal Mintál	

	<i>Insights into how citizens understand democracy and under what conditions they are willing to tolerate violations of democratic norms.</i> 10:25 – 10:40 Research Briefing 4 When Do Repressive Measures Become Acceptable? Ilker Kalin <i>Experimental research involving approximately 5,200 respondents in Slovakia, Hungary and Türkiye, examining public reactions to restrictions imposed on civil society organisations.</i> 10:40 – 11:00 Research Synthesis and Discussion A moderated discussion bringing together the four perspectives presented: What do these findings collectively tell us about the vulnerability and resilience of democracy?	
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break	
11:30 – 12:30 FPSIR auditorium	Programme Session 6 in cooperation with Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica From Democratic Backsliding to Civic Resilience: What Works? This panel builds on the findings presented in the morning session and shifts the focus from diagnosis to response: What do research and practical experience tell us about effective civic responses to authoritarian practices and democratic backsliding? • Róbert Dobrovodský, Ombudsman – an institutional and legal perspective: fundamental rights, democratic safeguards and the limits of state power. • Researcher/expert from Birmingham – a comparative academic perspective on democratic backsliding, civic resistance and civil society resilience. • Civil society practitioner – first-hand experience of responding to pressure on democracy, bringing a practical civil society perspective to the discussion. Panel discussion Moderator: Jozef Michal Mintál	
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch	
13:30 – 15:00 Room P4	Programme Session 7 in cooperation with GLOBSEC and the City of Banská Bystrica Participation as a Tool for Strengthening Democracy at the Local Level	

	Today, the question of participation is no longer whether to engage people, but how. The discussion will offer concrete experiences from local governments, experts, civic organisations and active practitioners. We will explore what works in participation, where its limits lie, what different stakeholders have learned, and what we can do differently, better or more effectively. Our aim is to inspire one another, identify shared challenges and seek ways to strengthen meaningful participation and cooperation between public administration and civil society. Speakers: Jana Kazaz, Eva Schön, Zorka Bútorová, Marija Rukljač Jelinčić, Aleksandra Grubič Jureško, Xénia Makarová, Beata Hirt, Maroš Chmelík, Veronika Střelcová, Paul Sheridan and others – TBC Roundtable discussion Moderator: Miriam Hargašová, GLOBSEC	
15:00 – 15:30	Break and transfer to ZÁHRADA – Centre for Independent Culture	
15:30 – 17:30	Programme Session 8 in cooperation with the Platform for Democracy Workshop 1: Transparency and Funding of Civil Society How should transparency and funding of civil society be structured? Which forms of funding and oversight of NGOs have worked, and which have not? What should the state fund, and where should it simply support philanthropy? How can the system be redesigned after a period of funding cuts? Together, we will discuss how to prepare for a possible change in civil society funding. Workshop 2: Civil Society and Its Relationship with the State What changes are needed in the institutional position of civil society? Should the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society be retained or replaced with a self-governing body modelled on those representing business or trade unions? How should the sector be represented in dealings with the state in the future? What model of mutual relations could strengthen the non-profit sector? Together, we will explore what changes in state governance could give civil society a stronger voice.	
17:30 – 18:00	Coffee break	
18:00 – 19:30	Programme Session 9 in cooperation with the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	

	Attacks on Institutions and Civil Society: The Independence of the Rule of Law Under Threat. In its latest Rule of Law Report, the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights warns of escalating attacks on independent institutions and civil society. What do these systematic pressures mean for public trust in the rule of law? Where do the interests of civil society and independent institutions converge, and how can we jointly counter the erosion of the rule of law? Zuzana Dlugošová – President of the Whistleblower Protection Office Representative of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights in Slovakia – TBC <i>Additional speakers to be confirmed</i> Public discussion	
19:30 – 22:00	Networking – A Glass of Wine at ZÁHRADA – Centre for Independent Culture	

DAY 3 – 26 November (Thursday)

Záhrada – Centre for Independent Culture

Time	Programme session	
8:30 – 9:00	Registration and coffee break	
9:00 – 11:00	Programme Session 10 in cooperation with the Center for Community Organizing 9:00 – 9:15 Opening Young People, Safety and Resilience Welcome and brief remarks by representatives of the City of Banská Bystrica and the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region on the topic: Why youth safety, the online environment and the prevention of radicalisation require society-wide attention, and the role of local and regional authorities in building safe and resilient communities.	

9:15 – 9:40 | Short Expert Presentations

Young People, Online Safety and Radicalisation: What Do We Know Today?

What do we know about the radicalisation of young people, their experiences online, and the factors that increase vulnerability or, conversely, strengthen their safety and resilience? What does this mean for early prevention?

Presentations featuring current data, research findings and practical experience.

9:40 – 10:45 | Human Forum Roundtable

From Intervention to Prevention: How Can We Build Safety Before a Crisis Occurs?

What is already working in Slovakia, and what is still missing? What can we do weeks and months before a young person experiences a crisis or is identified as being at risk? What should a whole-of-society approach to prevention look like in practice, and who should be responsible for what?

A discussion involving representatives of civil society, young people, local governments, education, research, youth and mental health services, the private sector, the media and organisations working to prevent radicalisation.

10:45 – 11:00 | Human Forum Youth 2026 Call to Action

From discussion to concrete action: presentation and joint signing of a call to action addressing specific needs relating to young people's safety, resilience and the prevention of radicalisation.

The call to action and its recommendations will be prepared in cooperation with participating organisations before the conference.

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00 **Programme Session 11**

in cooperation with the Center for Community Organizing

11:30 – 12:30 | Young People in Action

Four Local Authorities. Four Projects. Young People Changing Their Communities.

Young people from four local authorities will present specific initiatives they have designed and implemented in their communities.

The projects will show how young people can create safe spaces, build relationships and a sense of belonging, involve people who are often marginalised, and transform their surroundings. They will also highlight the importance of an environment in which young people experience that their voices and actions matter.

12:30 – 13:00 | Youth Discussion

What Do Young People Need to Change Their Communities?

A moderated discussion with young people about what helped them carry out their projects, the obstacles they encountered, and what local authorities, schools and communities can do to give young people genuine opportunities to participate and influence their surroundings.

13:00 – 13:15 | Closing

Safe and Resilient Communities Are Built Before a Crisis!

Key messages from Human Forum Youth 2026 and next steps following the joint call to action.

13:15 – 14:00

Lunch